

## CLAIMS:

1. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:
  - accessing of an exchange system by a first user;
  - 5 offering, by the first user, a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce;
  - storing of the offer of the first user by the exchange system;
  - accessing of the exchange system by a second user;
  - searching of the exchange system by the second user;
  - 10 accepting the offer of the first user by the second user;
  - transferring ownership of the first amount of the first article of commerce to the second user; and
  - transferring ownership of the second amount of the second article of commerce to the first user.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1, wherein the first accessing step further includes the steps of authenticating the first user and associating the first user with a first system account and the second accessing step further includes the steps of authenticating the second user and associating the second user with a second system account.
- 20 3. The method of claim 2, wherein the system accounts are escrow accounts.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein the exchange system is utilized over a network.
5. The method of claim 1, wherein the storing step uses a database  
25 to store the offer.
6. The method of claim 5, wherein the searching step includes the second user searching the database.
7. The method of claim 1, wherein the first transferring step  
30 includes transferring the first amount of the first article of commerce from an escrow account of the first user to an escrow account of the second user and the second transferring step includes transferring the second amount of the second article of commerce from an escrow account of the second user to the escrow account of the first user.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein a fee is charged to allow the first user to use the exchange system.

9. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

5                   permitting a first user to electronically submit an offer of a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce, wherein the first amount of the first article of commerce is held in an escrow account associated with the first user;

                  permitting a second user to search through a plurality of offers, and  
10                  permitting the second user to electronically accept the offer of the first user, wherein the second amount of the second article of commerce is held in an escrow account associated with the second user.

10. The method of claim 9, wherein the first permitting step includes the step of providing for verifying that the first user has the first amount of  
15                  the first article of commerce in the escrow account associated with the first user.

11. The method of claim 9, wherein the second permitting step includes the step of providing for transferring the first amount of the first article of commerce to the escrow account of the second user.

12. The method of claim 9, wherein the second permitting step  
20                  includes the step of providing for verifying that the second user has the second amount of the second article of commerce in the escrow account associated with the second user.

13. The method of claim 9, wherein the second permitting step includes the step of providing for transferring the second amount of the second article  
25                  of commerce to the escrow account of the first user.

14. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

                  permitting a first user to electronically offer a first amount of a first  
                  article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce  
30                  wherein the first user has the first amount of the first article of commerce held in an escrow account; and

                  permitting a second user to view the offer of the first user.

15. The method of claim 14, further including the step of permitting the second user to accept the offer of the first user.

16. The method of claim 15, further including the step of permitting, upon the second user accepting the offer of the first user, an exchange of the first amount of the first article of commerce for the second amount of the second article of commerce.

17. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

permitting a first user to offer a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce, wherein the first user has the first amount of the first article of commerce in an escrow account; storing the offer of the first user in a database; and permitting a second user to search the database.

18. The method of claim 17, further including the step of permitting the second user to accept an offer in the database.

19. The method of claim 18, further including the step of removing an offer from the database in response to the offer being accepted.

20. The method of claim 17, wherein the first amount of the first article of commerce is placed on hold within the account of the first user for the duration of the offer.

21. The method of claim 20, wherein the first amount of the first article of commerce that is on hold is transferred to a second user upon acceptance of the offer by the second user.

22. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

listing an offer of a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce, wherein the first user has the first amount of the first article of commerce in an escrow account; and allowing a user to accept the listed offer.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein the listed offers are stored in a database.

24. The method of claim 23, wherein the user is able to search the database of offers.

25. An exchange system comprising:  
means for allowing a first user to offer a first amount of a first article  
of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce, wherein  
the first user has the first amount of the first article of commerce in an escrow  
5 account; and

means for allowing a second user to accept the offer of the first user.

26. The system of claim 25, wherein the allowing to offer means  
includes a database to store the offer of the first user.

27. The system of claim 25, wherein the allowing to offer means  
10 includes computer software.

28. The system of claim 25, wherein the allowing to accept means  
includes computer software.

29. The system of claim 25, further comprising means for allowing  
ownership of the first amount of the first article of commerce to be transferred to the  
15 second user and for ownership of the second amount of the second article of  
commerce to be transferred to the first user.

30. An exchange system comprising an offer-storing database, the  
database being configured to store offers to trade amounts of articles of commerce for  
amounts of other articles of commerce, the articles of commerce being held in escrow  
20 accounts and the offers being selectable by a second user.

31. The exchange system of claim 30, wherein offers selected by  
the second user can then be accepted by the second user.

32. The exchange system of claim 31, wherein the accepted offers  
are removed from the offer-storing database.

25 33. The exchange system of claim 30, wherein the offers stored in  
the database are created by a first user.

34. The exchange system of claim 33, wherein the first user is  
associated with an escrow account containing the articles that the first user is offering  
to trade.

30 35. A method in a computer system for exchanging articles of  
commerce, the method comprising the steps of:

receiving, over a communication network from a first client, a  
transmission of an offer to exchange a first amount of a first article of commerce for a

second amount of a second article of commerce, the first client having the first amount of the first article of commerce in a first escrow account;

storing the offer;

permitting the offer to be communicated to a second client; and

5 receiving, over the communication network from the second client, a transmission of an acceptance of the offer, the second client having the second amount of the second article of commerce in a second escrow account.

36. The method of claim 35, wherein, upon completion of the receiving an acceptance step, the system transfers articles from the first account to the  
10 second account and from the second account to the first account.

37. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

permitting a first user to offer a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce;

15 permitting a second user to offer a third amount of the second article of commerce for a fourth amount of the first article of commerce;

verifying that the first amount of the first article of commerce is equal to or larger than the fourth amount of the first article;

20 verifying that the third amount of the second article is equal to or greater than the second amount of the second article; and

providing for the execution of a trade.

38. The system of claim 37, wherein the provided for trade results in the first user receiving the second amount of the second article of commerce, the second user receiving the fourth amount of the first article of commerce, and the  
25 system retaining any difference between the first and fourth amounts of the first article of commerce and any difference between the second and third amounts of the second article of commerce.

39. The system of claim 38, further comprising the step of providing for issuance of a notice of the executed trade to the first user and to the  
30 second user.

40. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

accessing of an exchange system by a first user; and

offering, by the first user, a first amount of a first article of commerce contained in an escrow account in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce, wherein the exchange system permits a second user to accept the offer of the first user provided that the second user has the second amount of the second article of commerce contained in an escrow account.

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41. The method of claim 40, wherein the offers are searchable by the second user.

42. The method of claim 40, wherein the offers are stored on a database.

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43. The method of claim 40, wherein the accessing step is performed over a network.

44. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

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accessing of an exchange system by a second user;  
viewing offers from users including an offer from a first user to exchange a first amount of a first article of commerce for a second amount of a second article of commerce; and  
accepting an offer, wherein the second user has the second amount of the second article of commerce in an escrow account.

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45. The method of claim 44, wherein the offers are stored in a database.

46. The method of claim 44, wherein the accessing step is performed over a network.

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47. The method of claim 44, wherein the first user and the second user each have escrow accounts with the exchange system.

48. The method of claim 44, wherein the offer of the first user is removed from the system when the offer is accepted by the second user.

49. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

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receiving articles of commerce; and  
providing for the articles of commerce to be associated with a first user, wherein the first user is permitted to trade the articles of commerce with other users of an exchange system that choose to trade with the first user.

50. The method of claim 49, wherein the providing step includes associating the articles of commerce with an escrow account.

51. The method of claim 49, wherein the providing step includes forwarding the received articles to another location.

5 52. The method of claim 49, wherein a record of the received articles is maintained by the exchange system.

53. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

10 transmitting a first communication of a first user, the communication offering to trade a first amount of a first article of commerce contained in an escrow account for a second amount of a second article of commerce;

transmitting a listing of offers; and

transmitting a second communication of a second user, the second communication accepting the offer of the first user.

15 54. The method of claim 53, further including the step of transmitting confirmation of the trade.

55. The method of claim 53, further including the steps of transmitting a third communication to identify the first user; and transmitting a fourth communication to identify the second user.

20 56. The method of claim 55, wherein the third communication associates the first user with the escrow account and the fourth communication associates the second user with an escrow account.

57. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:

25 permitting a first user to electronically submit an offer of a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce; and

permitting a second user to electronically accept the offer of the first user.

30 58. The method of claim 57, wherein the first permitting step includes the step of providing for verifying that the first user has the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce in an escrow account associated with the first user.

59. The method of claim 57, wherein the second permitting step includes the step of providing for transferring the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce to an escrow account of the second user.

5 60. The method of claim 57, wherein the second permitting step includes the step of providing for verifying that the second user has the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce in an escrow account associated with the second user.

61. The method of claim 57, wherein the second permitting step includes the step of providing for transferring the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce to an escrow account of the first user.

62. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:

15 permitting a first user to electronically offer a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce; and

permitting a second user to view the offer of the first user.

63. The method of claim 62, further including the step of permitting the second user to accept the offer of the first user.

20 64. The method of claim 62, further including the step of permitting, upon the second user accepting the offer of the first user, an exchange of the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce for the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce.

65. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:

25 permitting a first user to offer a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce;

storing the offer of the first user in a database; and

permitting a second user to search the database.

30 66. The method of claim 65, further including the step of permitting the second user to accept an offer in the database.

67. The method of claim 65, further including the step of removing an offer from the database in response to the offer being accepted.



68. The method of claim 65, wherein the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce is placed on hold within an account of the first user for the duration of the offer.

69. The method of claim 65, wherein the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce that is on hold is transferred to a second user upon acceptance of the offer by the second user.

70. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:

listing of an offer of a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce; and

allowing a user to accept the listed offer.

71. The method of claim 70, wherein the listed offers are stored in a database.

72. The method of claim 70, wherein the user is able to search the database of offers.

73. An exchange system comprising:

means for allowing a first user to offer a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce; and

means for allowing a second user to accept the offer of the first user.

74. The system of claim 73, wherein the allowing to offer means includes a database to store the offer of the first user.

75. The system of claim 73, wherein the allowing to offer means includes computer software.

76. The system of claim 74, wherein the allowing to accept means includes computer software.

77. The system of claim 74, further comprising means for allowing ownership of the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce to be transferred to the second user and for ownership of the second non-currency amount of the second article of commerce to be transferred to the first user.

78. An exchange system comprising an offer-storing database, the database being configured to store offers to trade amounts of non-currency articles of

commerce for amounts of other non-currency articles of commerce, the offers being selectable by a second user.

79. The exchange system of claim 78, wherein offers selected by the second user can then be accepted by the second user.

5 80. The exchange system of claim 79, wherein the accepted offers are removed from the offer-storing database.

81. The exchange system of claim 78, wherein the offers stored in the database are created by a first user.

10 82. The exchange system of claim 81, wherein the first user is associated with an account containing the non-currency articles that the first user is offering to trade.

83. A method in a computer system for exchanging non-currency articles of commerce, the method comprising the steps of:

15 receiving, over a communication network from a first client, a transmission of an offer to exchange a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce;  
storing the offer;  
permitting the offer to be communicated to a second client; and  
20 receiving, over the communication network from the second client, a transmission of an acceptance of the offer.

84. The method of claim 83, wherein the first client is associated with a first account and the second client is associated with a second account.

25 85. The method of claim 84, wherein, upon completion of the receiving an acceptance step, the system transfers non-currency articles from the first account to the second account and from the second account to the first account.

86. A method in a computer system for exchanging non-currency articles of commerce, the method comprising the steps of:

30 receiving, over a communication network from a first client, a transmission of an offer to exchange a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce;  
receiving, over a communication network from a second client, a transmission of an offer to exchange the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce for the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce;

matching the offer of the first client with the offer of the second client;  
and

providing for performance of the exchange.

5           87.     The method of claim 86, further comprising the step of  
providing for notifying the first user and the second user of the exchange.

          88.     The method of claim 86, further comprising the step of  
providing for verifying that the first amount of the first non-currency article of  
commerce is available to be traded.

10           89.     The method of claim 86, further comprising the step of  
providing for verifying that the second amount of the second non-currency article of  
commerce is available to be traded.

          90.     A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce  
including the steps of:

15                 allowing a first user to offer a first amount of a first non-currency  
article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of  
commerce;

               allowing a second user to offer the second amount of the second non-  
currency article of commerce in trade for the first amount of the first non-currency  
article of commerce; and

20                 exchanging the first amount of the first non-currency article of  
commerce and the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce  
between the first user and second user.

          91.     The method of claim 90, further comprising the step of  
providing for notifying the first user and the second user of the exchange.

25           92.     A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce  
including the steps of:

               permitting a first user to offer a first amount of a first non-currency  
article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of  
commerce;

30                 permitting a second user to offer a third amount of the second non-  
currency article of commerce for a fourth amount of the first non-currency article of  
commerce;

verifying that the first amount of the first non-currency article of commerce is equal to or larger than the fourth amount of the first non-currency article of commerce;

5            verifying that the third amount of the second non-currency article is equal to or greater than the second amount of the second non-currency article; and  
             providing for the execution of a trade.

93.        The system of claim 92, wherein the provided for trade results in the first user receiving the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce, the second user receiving the fourth amount of the first non-currency  
10        article of commerce, and the system retaining any difference between the first and fourth amounts of the first non-currency article of commerce and any difference between the second and third amounts of the second non-currency article of commerce.

94.        The system of claim 92, further comprising the step of  
15        providing for issuance of a notice of the executed trade to the first user and to the second user.

95.        A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:  
             accessing of an exchange system by a first user; and  
20        offering, by the first user, a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce in trade for a second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce, wherein the exchange system permits a second user to accept the offer of the first user.

96.        The method of claim 95, wherein the offers are searchable by  
25        the second user.

97.        The method of claim 95, wherein the offers are stored on a database.

98.        The method of claim 95, wherein the first user and the second user each have escrow accounts with the exchange system.

30        99.        The method of claim 95, wherein the accessing step is performed over a network.

100.       A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce including the steps of:

accessing of an exchange system by a second user;  
viewing offers from a first user to exchange a first amount of a first  
non-currency article of commerce for a second amount of a second non-currency  
article of commerce; and

5 accepting an offer.

101. The method of claim 100, wherein the offers are stored in a  
database.

102. The method of claim 100, wherein the accessing step is  
performed over a network.

10 103. The method of claim 100, wherein the first user and the second  
user each have escrow accounts with the exchange system.

104. The method of claim 100, wherein the offer of the first user is  
removed from the system when the offer is accepted by the second user.

15 105. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce  
including the steps of:

receiving non-currency articles of commerce; and

providing for the non-currency articles of commerce to be associated  
with a first user, wherein the first user is permitted to trade the non-currency articles  
of commerce with other users of an exchange system.

20 106. The method of claim 105, wherein the providing step includes  
associating the non-currency articles of commerce with an escrow account.

107. The method of claim 105, wherein the providing step includes  
forwarding the received non-currency articles to another location.

25 108. The method of claim 105, wherein a record of the received non-  
currency articles is maintained by the exchange system.

109. A method of exchanging non-currency articles of commerce  
including the steps of:

transmitting a first communication of a first user, the communication  
offering to trade a first amount of a first non-currency article of commerce for a  
30 second amount of a second non-currency article of commerce;

transmitting a listing of offers; and

transmitting a second communication of a second user, the second  
communication accepting the offer of the first user.

110. The method of claim 109, further including the step of transmitting confirmation of the trade.

111. The method of claim 110, further including the steps of transmitting a third communication to identify the first user; and transmitting a fourth communication to identify the second user.

112. The method of claim 111, wherein the third communication associates the first user with an escrow account and the fourth communication associates the second user with an escrow account.

113. The method of claim 109, wherein the second amount of the second non-currency article of commerce is determined by the system.

114. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

accessing of an exchange system for a first user;  
offering, for the first user, a first amount of a first article of commerce  
in trade for a second amount of a second article of commerce;  
storing of the offer of the first user by the exchange system;  
accessing of the exchange system for a second user;  
searching of the exchange system for the second user;  
accepting the offer of the first user for the second user;  
transferring ownership of the first amount of the first article of commerce to the second user; and  
transferring ownership of the second amount of the second article of commerce to the first user.

115. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

accessing of an exchange system by a first user;  
offering, by the first user, a first amount of a first article of commerce in trade for a system determined second amount of a second article of commerce;  
storing of the offer of the first user by the exchange system;  
accessing of the exchange system by a second user;  
searching of the exchange system by the second user;  
accepting the offer of the first user by the second user;

transferring ownership of the first amount of the first article of commerce to the second user; and

transferring ownership of the second amount of the second article of commerce to the first user.

5                   116. The method of claim 115, wherein the second user also transfers cash to the first user.

117. A method of exchanging articles of commerce including the steps of:

10                   allowing a user to obtain a subscription to an exchange service environment;

allowing the user to exchange articles of commerce free from per-transaction charges within the service environment.

118. The method of claim 117, wherein the user obtains the subscription by paying a monthly fee.

15                   119. The method of claim 117, wherein the subscription allows the user to perform a set amount of exchanges per subscription period free from per-transaction charges.

120. The method of claim 119, wherein exchanges performed during the subscription period beyond the set amount result in per-transaction charges.

20                   121. The method of claim 117, wherein the subscription entitles the user to an unlimited number of exchanges as long as the user keeps the subscription current.

25                   122. The method of claim 117, wherein the exchange service environment is a stock trading environment that requires a periodic subscription fee and allows unlimited trading free from per-transaction charges for the duration of the subscription period.